



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Johnson and Councilor Watson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Administrative Secretary Sue Wells.

3. Calendar and Communications

Councilor O'Beirne stated that he had heard from a concerned citizen regarding reimbursement to the Town and Board of Education for the purchase of the temporary buildings for Cutler Junior High School and West Side Middle School. The citizen thought it would be an increase because if voted on prior to June 30th it would affect the 2013 budget. Councilor O'Beirne also stated that he had another inquiry into the Board of Ed's active budget that the item claimed for a savings for shutting down Fitch Middle School did not match up and Councilor O'Beirne thought the RTM should look into the amount.

Councilor Streeter stated that he had a complaint from a citizen that the women's bathrooms at Poquonnock Plains Park were in deplorable condition and he thought Parks and Recreation should look into this.

Councilor Schmidt stated that she would like to talk about the Energy Committee and would talk to the Mayor later

Councilor Peruzzotti - stated that she was on the Liaison to the Board of Education Committee and would like her name removed because she would not be able to attend meetings, which were the first Wednesday of every month.

Councilor Antipas said he had questions regarding Real Estate Tax breaks for seniors; how income was defined and he would ask the Finance Director, when he addressed the Council tonight.

Mayor Somers added she received notification that on Sunday March 18th there was going to be a reception for the Friends of Education Award for Dick Lovett, thanking him for his dedication to Groton public schools. Mayor Somers added that she just received this notification today.

Regarding the question asked under Communication by Councilor O'Beirne, Mayor Somers thought that no one has had a chance to review the Board of Education Budget. Town Manager Oefinger explained that funds were not treated as additional funding, that it would be a reimbursement. He continued that dollars were replacing dollars that were lent because of the project. Town Manager Oefinger said that we took money and just gave it to BOE it would increase their budget; we did it as a CIP and it will not increase their budget. Town Manager

Oefinger stated it did not matter when we got reimbursed it would not be counted as an additional appropriation and if there were dollars that came back it would be divided between the Board of Education and the Town.

4. Approval of Minutes

2012-0077 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of February 28, 2012 are hereby accepted and approved.

Tabled

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2012-0079 October 2011 Revaluation - Update

Discussed

Finance Director, Mr. Pandolfo addressed Councilor O'Beirne's previous question under communications regarding the Board of Education budget. He stated that the Board of Education did not increase appropriation and that it would not affect the Board of Education's budget. Mr. Pandolfo and Tax Assessor Gardner addressed Councilor Antipas's questions from communications. Tax Assessor Gardner stated that there was an 8% default program; and seniors could get their taxes deferred. She also stated that there was the circuit breaker; which was adjusted gross income plus social security. Councilor Dean asked about the AIG form and Mary said that they were available in the Assessor's office.

Finance Director Pandolfo and Assessor Mary Gardner reported on the results of the revaluation and discussed the 2011 Grand List and the shift from 2010 to 2011. Director Pandolfo and Assessor Gardner explained that the revaluation was conducted because it was mandatory by state law and that in 2011 there had to be a physical revaluation, which took place every five years. Mr. Pandolfo explained that the purpose of the revaluation was to bring real estate up to market value. Assessor Gardner reviewed the Grand List and each category. The categories were: gross assessment, total exemptions and net assessment and the taxable items which included real estate, personal property and motor vehicles. The Assessor and the Director of Finance explained the attachments and charts that were attached. Assessor Gardner spoke about the breakdown of the attached charts. She spoke about the chart on page 3, which was entitled: Grand List Variances: 2010-2011; \$ and % chart; which was net Real Estate; Personal Property; Motor Vehicle and total Net Grand List. Assessor Gardner also explained the Category Comparison totals of 2010 and 2011.

Mayor Somers asked what personal property was. Assessor Gardner explained that personal property was business personal property such as furniture, fixtures and machinery. Mayor Somers confirmed that was what the value of personal property was worth. Assessor Gardner said yes. Mr. Pandolfo added that the table they were speaking about was the taxable Grand List and that was what the mill rate was set from.

Assessor Gardner went over the breakdown of each category on the Net Grand List, which was the chart on page 9 of the attachment. This chart had the Political Subdivisions and Fire Districts.

Councilor Flax stated that everything went down except Groton Long Point and asked for a comment on that. Assessor Gardner reported that in 2006 their values went up and that their values maintained better than other properties; that revaluation is based on sales. Assessor Gardner stressed that sales were higher than the revaluation price. Councilor Flax stated that

basing it on real estate sales that there were 600 property sales total; and he asked how many sales where Groton Long Point's. Assessor Gardner answered there were 18 sales in about a year and a half for Groton Long Point. She stated that a revaluation is a mass appraisal; and there were 370 sales for the whole project.

Councilor Flax stated that in the City of Groton area values went up and asked why. Assessor Gardner stated that the Grand List Industrial went up. Councilor Flax asked if she knew of other areas on the water similar to Groton Long Point. Assessor Gardner stated that she thought in East Lyme. Assessor Gardner suggested that Councilor Flax go to East Lyme's Website to see the results of their recent revaluation.

Councilor Streeter stated that Groton Long Point had 600 homes and there were 18 homes that were sold; and he asked if that was comparable in square footage and acreage. Assessor Gardner stated that all were figured in the Mass Appraisal project. Councilor Streeter added that at previous meetings, a citizen came forward and wanted to know the formula for revaluation. Assessor Gardner said that he could come to see her anytime at her office. Assessor Gardner then explained the appraisals that were put on those properties, they applied age and appraisal; and they applied the same values on the land as on the buildings and it also depended on the quality of construction.

Councilor Streeter also asked what the Board of Assessment of Appeals would be looking for. Assessor Gardner said that the important thing was that the data was correct and she added that there was no formula.

Mayor Somers stated that 7% increase to a small amount of property owners in Town was a burden on property owners and out of 711 properties there was less than a 10% increase. Mayor Somers thought this was unfair to tax people on unrealized gain. She thought for the future that the Town Council would have to give some thought to this process. Finance Director Pandolfo noted that if your assessment went down more than 8% that you would see a reduction and that 68% of the people would see a reduction. Mayor Somers asked if any of the top 10 tax payers signed up for the Board of Assessment Appeals. Assessor Gardner answered that the Marriot Hotel had signed up.

Councilor Flax stated that Pfizer was 15% of the Grand List and he asked what would happen if they left Town in two year and would they still be responsible for their taxes. Assessor Gardner said that our Business Grand asset would change, but they would be responsible for their taxes. She also stated that Pfizer was marketing some things for lease right now.

Councilor Antipas asked how the State Statue read on how you were allowed to appraise and was there any one method that the state said you had to use. Councilor Antipas also questioned the Assessor about mass appraisal. Assessor Gardner explained to Councilor Antipas that there were guidelines and that her office reviews property values every day.

Councilor Peruzzotti asked if you look at Pfizer's total assessment would this number include both real estate versus personal property. Assessor Gardner said they had that information in her office. Finance Director Pandolfo stated that he would provide the Town Council with this information.

2011-0218

Fitch High School Baseball Field - Update

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to go into Executive Session at 7:44 p.m..

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Town Councilors came out of Executive Session at 8:40 p.m.

2012-0049 Purchase of Fusconi Property, Crystal Lake Road**Discussed**

Town Manager Oefinger reported that he was waiting for the upcoming State Bond Commission, which was at the end of March for the funds approved by State. The Town Manager said that he was already authorized and as soon as this happened the Town Council could meet and review this project in Executive Session.

2012-0070 Judson Avenue Drainage**Recommended for a Resolution**

Director Gary Schneider addressed the Town Council on potential bonded projects. He reported that in FYE 2011 that \$50,000 was approved for preliminary engineering to improved existing drainage system on Judson Avenue in the area of Sommersett Drive. Several residents had experienced flooding in their basements a study found that the existing drainage system was not constructed to handle the current design standard of 25-year storm. Mr. Schneider asked the Town Council in what direction they wanted to proceed. The Estimated amount of the Bond Ordinance would be \$1.6 million and this cost would not help all the people from having flooded basements.

Councilor Streeter asked if this project was in the CIP this year. Director Schneider said that it was, but it would have to be bonded and taken to the voters in November. Mayor Somers asked how many residents were affected. Mr. Schneider answered that there were 20 or 30. Mr. Schneider added that some residents were affected by the Road Maintenance Bond Project and that he would not recommend tearing up the entire road.

Councilor Antipas stated that spending \$1.6 million; and he knew that water was a tricky thing; he commented that the Town could spend the money and we would not really be sure what would happen. He asked Mr. Schneider if that was as far as he could take it? Mr. Schneider stated that one resident dam proofed his basement for \$20,000. He added that the main problem with most of the basements that had water was that their driveways were lower than the street itself.

Councilor Peruzzotti stated that she would not vote for this item. She said that she had sympathy for the 20 or 30 citizens, but it would be hard to support \$1.6 million for 20-30 citizens. She stated that the plan we have in place was the minimal amount that could be done and that it may not solve the problem.

Town Manager Oefinger explained that a fair amount of the affected homes should not have been built and that we could not fix that and that there were 70 homes in the general area and 20-25 were affected. He added that Public Works had done an extensive survey of the neighborhood to see if they had been having trouble in this area.

A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to direct Staff to place this project for consideration in a future fiscal year.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

Councilor Peruzzotti asked that if the Town were to move forward and take 4 projects forward; what would be the cost to bring to the voters. Town Manager Oefinger said that he would not agree to bring 4 items to the voters and that 4 questions would cost around \$4 million dollars. He said that items could be phased in. Councilor Streeter added that when the residents of Judson Avenue came in to meet with the Town Manager, Town Engineer Greg Hanover and himself; it was agreed upon to have a study done, but it was not going to correct the flooding problem.

2012-0081 Human Services Radon Ventilation Systems Supplemental Appropriation**Discussed**

Director Schneider was requesting a supplemental appropriation request to vent the radon from the basement and building at Human Services and requesting a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$8,000 from the Capital Improvement unassigned fund balance to the Capital Improvement Project FYE 2012 #501015518. Mayor Somers asked Director Schneider if we were sure it would work. Mr. Schneider answered that it had to be tested when completed under the performance contract.

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0076 Increase in Mystic Streetscape ARRA Funding

Discussed

Mike Murphy, Director of Planning, asked the Town Council to authorize the Town Manager to execute a first supplemental agreement between the State of Connecticut and the Town of Groton to increase its funding for construction, inspection and maintenance activities associated with the Groton Mystic Streetscape and utility relocation improvements in Downtown Mystic.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0082 Mystic Streetscape Project Construction Agreement

Discussed

Planning Director Mike Murphy reported to the Town Council that he and the Finance Director had been speaking to the Connecticut Department of Transportation for this agreement, since the State took the position that it could not reimburse the Town for its expenses. Mr. Murphy explained that ARRA was payment for construction. Mr. Murphy and the Finance Department had been pressing CONNDOT for development of this agreement for some time, since the State had taken the position that it could not reimburse the Town for its expenses without it.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2012-0062 Groton Heights School Reuse Task Force Final Report

Not Discussed

2012-0040 Town Council Goal Setting

Discussed

Mayor Somers reported how well setting a special meeting for Goal Setting worked out last time and she would like to schedule another one. Mayor Somers suggested starting a Committee of the Whole or Town Council meeting an hour early for a Goal Setting meeting. Everyone agreed this was a good idea.

Councilor Peruzzotti submitted information from when she and Councilor Watson met to discuss their issues for Goal Setting.

2012-0009 FYE 2013 Budget

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger reported that the FYE 2013 Budget Hearing would take place on Thursday, March 29th, at 7:00 p.m. at the Senior Center. He reported that the proposed FYE 2013 Budgets, Outside Agency Budgets, and that last week the Board of Education budgets were handed out. Town Manager Oefinger reported that the Outside Agency budgets were done a little differently this year; that they were defined as in the budget and that the subdivisions, Groton Long Point and the City, were defined separately.

Town Manager Oefinger briefly reported on this year's budget. He said there was a total increase of 3.5% and the total budget was \$122,600,000. Mr. Oefinger reported that there were four areas of services: Town Operations were up \$623,000, at 0.9%, Education had a zero increase, Capitol Debt had a \$1.8 million increase and up 28%, Outside Agencies were up \$73,000, a 3.6% increase and Subdivisions had a \$1.6 million increase or 32.8% and contingency had a zero increase. Town Manager Oefinger reported that the Grand List went down and the mill rate is going up even though the Grand List went down.

Town Manager Oefinger discussed with the Town Council the Budget Review Calendar and it was decided that they would like to cancel the scheduled Town Council meetings and treat them as Budget Review meetings. The following meeting changes were discussed:

- Cancel regular TC/COW meetings for Tuesday, April 10th and April 17th and hold -- - Budget review meetings those nights*
- Have no budget review meeting on Thursday, April 12th*
- Move April 12th Budget Review to Tuesday, April 10th*
- Move the Saturday, April 21st meeting to Tuesday, April 17th*
- Have no meeting on Saturday, April 21st*
- Monday, April 23rd, hold special meeting to set Budget*
- Thursday, April 26th, cancel meeting*

2012-0080**Annual RTM Budget Meeting****Discussed**

A resolution was set for the Annual RTM Budget Meeting, to be held on Monday, April 30th at 7:00 p.m. at the Groton Senior Center.

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Antipas, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:50 p.m., Councilor Streeter made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, passes, 7-0-0.